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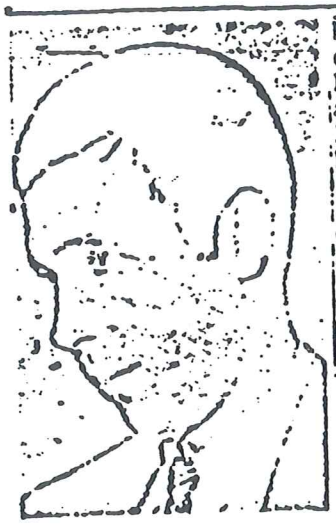

PERRY R. RUSSO

RUSSO DISPUTES NBC BROADCAST

Witness Says He Told Truth About Plot

Perry Raymond Russo Tuesday disputed parts of a National Broadcasting Co. program concerning District Attorney Jim Garrison's assassination investigation and said he had always told the "absolute truth" while testifying in the case.

Russo, principal witness in a hearing in which businessman Clay L. Shaw was ordered held over for trial on a charge of conspiring to kill President John F. Kennedy, answered newsmen's questions at a press conference in the office of Assistant District Attorney James L. Alcock.

NBC quoted Russo as saying he had not told the truth when he testified that Shaw conspired with Lee Harvey Oswald and David W. Ferrie.

Russo denied making the statement; and whenever a reporter pointedly asked him if he had always told the truth while under oath in the criminal district courts building, he replied, "The absolute truth."

Russo, fielding questions confidently, identified the three persons who contacted him on behalf of NBC as Walter Sheridan, of the NBC news staff, Richard Townley, of WDSU-TV at New Orleans and Saturday Evening Post writer James Phelan.

Sheridan appeared on Monday night's NBC program critical of Garrison's investigation and quoted Russo as saying he was sorry he ever got into the investigation.

WORDS 'TWISTED'

Tuesday, Russo said that Sheridan "twisted" what he said. Russo said he meant that he was disgusted with effects on his personal life. "He twisted it around," Russo said of Sheridan and his report.

WDSU reporter Jim Michie and his camera crew were excluded from the press conference. When Russo, flanked by a number of district attorney's assistants, exited from the office, he made no replies to Michie's questions.

Russo said he has never actually taken a lie detector test. It was one of NBC's contentions that Russo gave information that was not certified by a lie detector test.

Russo said the operator could not get a positive reaction on preliminary test questions.

He also said that positive reactions again failed to appear on test questions Monday in the criminal courts building during another polygraph examination attempt.

'HIGHLY NERVOUS'

Leonard Gurvich, a partner in Gurvich Brothers detective agency, said Russo was "highly nervous" when he attempted to give him a polygraph test several months ago.

Russo quoted WDSU newsman Townley as having told him that the NBC group was working with Shaw's defense in an effort to wreck the state's case.

Russo also said that members of the trio told him that both NBC and the Central Intelligence Agency were "out to wreck the Garrison investigation."

Garrison charged that Kennedy was murdered by anti-Castroites who previously worked for the CIA and that the CIA covered up the fact.

Townley, Phelan and Sheridan made repeated visits to his home, Russo said, to try to persuade him to appear on NBC's documentary program. However, Russo said he was always in contact with the district attorney's office about these visits.

"I never met with any of these people without knowledge on the part of the district attorney," Russo said.

Russo said that "Sheridan offered to set me up in California, protect my job and guarantee that Garrison would never get me extradited back to Louisiana."

Ed Planer, news director of WDSU-TV, an NBC affiliate, said Russo's "versions of his conversations with Richard Townley are not the same as the dated and timed memorandum that Townley wrote following their conversations."

In New York, an NBC spokesman said Townley talked with Russo on several occasions but "denied telling him he was working closely with the defense on threatening to ruin Russo's reputation."

"On the contrary," the spokesman continued, "Townley says it was Russo who brought up the subject of reputation and says Russo admitted the defense could 'tear him apart.'"

"Russo suggested to Townley that Townley should act as a go-between between Russo and the defense lawyers," the spokesman said. "Russo said if defense lawyers ask him the right questions at the trial, then he would voice his doubts about identifying Clay Shaw."

Townley issued a blanket denial of any CIA complicity, the spokesman said, adding that Russo expressed doubts to Sheridan, Townley and Phelan on separate occasions that his pre-trial testimony was entirely true. He said Russo asked the NBC team on separate occasions to "find a way out" for him.

"This is the same man who told Townley it is now difficult for him to distinguish between reality and fantasy", the spokesman said, adding that there is "absolutely no truth" to

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SECTION 1
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Russo's statements about Sheridan.

A press release issued at the conference consisted of a copy of a memorandum from Assistant District Attorney Andrew J. Sciambra to Garrison, relative to conversations between Russo and the three newsmen.

Sciambra quoted Russo as saying that Townley offered to arrange a deal in which Russo would permit a question to be asked by Shaw's defense.

That part of Sciambra's statement follows:

"Perry said that Townley told him that he (Townley) should act as an intermediary between Russo and the defense and that he could get Dymond to take it easy on him if he allows the defense to ask this question, 'From your knowledge of hypnosis Mr. Russo, do you feel after reading the transcript that the questions that were asked to you by the district attorney's office were natural or leading questions which allowed you to fantasize.' And Russo would say, 'From my understanding of hypnosis, I would say that they were leading questions."

Phelan has said that Russo did not mention an alleged party which Shaw, Oswald and Ferrie supposedly attended until after submitting to hypnosis.

Sciambra stated Russo said that Sheridan told him that what he wanted Russo to do was to get on NBC national television and say, "I am sorry for what I said because I lied, some of what I said was true but I was doctored by the district attorney's staff into testifying like I did."

Also Tuesday the Federal Communications Commission said it has received a complaint from Garrison charging NBC with trying to destroy his presidential assassination investigation.

Garrison also charged NBC with using its news gathering function as a guise and cover for conduct which he said was intended to affect the course and outcome of his case against Shaw.

The six-page letter was addressed to FCC chairman Rosel H. Hyde, who forwarded it to the commission's complaints and compliance division.

An FCC official explained that under normal procedure a copy of the complaint is sent to the broadcaster, who is given 20 days to reply. The commission then determines whether there has been any violation of federal law or FCC regulations.